



Please accept This  
letter to replace the  
one sent to Sec. Caton  
July 18. The earlier  
letter inadvertently  
had "July 34" in  
the first line.

Thank you.

Jane Williams

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United States  
National Commission on  
Libraries and Information Science

July 18, 1997

Honorable William F. Caton  
The Secretary  
Federal Communications Commission  
1919 M Street, NW  
Room 222  
Washington, DC 20554

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Dear Secretary Caton:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the July 3, 1997, petition by SBC Communications, Inc./Southwestern Bell Telephone Company to review the FCC's Report and Order, FCC No. 97-157, in the matter of Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service, CC Docket 96-45. released May 8, 1997.

The U.S. National Commission on Libraries and Information Science (NCLIS), an independent federal agency, advises the President and the Congress on national and international policy matters affecting libraries and information services. To carry out that responsibility, NCLIS studies, surveys and analyzes the library and information needs of the nation; appraises the adequacies and deficiencies of current library and information resources and research and development activities; conducts hearings; and issues publications.

Since 1994 NCLIS has sponsored surveys and publications of heretofore uncollected information on public libraries' connections to the Internet. The 1996 survey showed rapid rises in connectivity; differences in costs, types of connections and resulting services; geographic and economic disparities; and other important findings. For current purposes, the most significant findings were that

- from 1994 to 1996, public library-Internet connectivity increased 113% overall--from 20.9% to 44.6%, and
- public library-Internet connectivity could exceed 75% by 1997.

This year NCLIS is co-sponsoring with the American Library Association an update to these findings. The data collection only ended yesterday and the process of analyzing the data has just begun. Therefore, we are not able in this present letter to relay any of the 1997 survey's findings, but we will keep you informed as the data are analyzed. We did use data from the 1994 and 1996 surveys to comment to the FCC twice last year--April 8 and May 7--regarding plans for universal telecommunications service discounts for libraries as required by the Telecommunications Act of 1996.

Our April 1996 cover letter to FCC Chairman Hundt summarized the comments:

Without effective telecommunications service rate provisions, America's libraries will be unable to continue their long tradition of cooperation, connectivity, and computerization; our libraries will be unable to continue providing public access to knowledge and information that represent a diverse range of sources and viewpoints; and ability of libraries to provide support for the increasingly vital needs of the educational community will diminish.

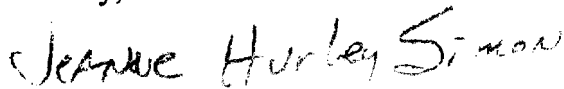
For the above and other reasons stated in our 1996 comments, the NCLIS Commissioners strongly supported provisions of the Telecommunications Act of 1996 that established universal service support mechanisms assuring that libraries have access to advanced telecommunications services at discounted rates. We consequently view any interruption in implementing discounts--such as that proposed by SBC Communications, Inc.--as unnecessary and unwise.

First, libraries are moving ahead rapidly, as confirmed by our studies--with equipment, connections, training, etc.--to provide their users with electronic services and information otherwise unavailable. In other words, they are planning, budgeting and acquiring the resources for the services available by telecommunications. They also are progressing on the basis of telecommunications laws and rules enacted last year and this year. Library users therefore need and expect certain services and connections to be in place in a timely fashion. Delays affect users, not just the libraries as institutions.

Second, the process whereby the rules were considered, formulated and published allowed adequate time for all interested parties to make their positions clear. A ruling that could not satisfy everyone is no cause to re-open the decision.

Thank you for considering these views.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jeanne Hurley Simon".

Jeanne Hurley Simon  
Chairperson